



Ministry of the Word

*Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> November 2018*

by Vincent Gannon

**Scripture:** Hebrews 6:4-8

**Subject:** Part 15, Chapter – The Dangerous State of Languish

The fourth warning in the book of Hebrews is from here in these verses 4 to 8, let's read them:

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit,<sup>5</sup> and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come,<sup>6</sup> if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.<sup>7</sup> For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God;<sup>8</sup> but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned.*

When the Scriptures commence, as it does in verse 4, with the phrase, "*it is impossible*", it ought to get our attention. If it were any other book starting with the same term, we might very well discount because we know that with the passage of time, things considered "impossible" in the past have often come to pass, such as the world being able to witness the same event, at the same time which years ago, never mind centuries, would have been

thought as impossible. But access to modern technology that is available world-wide has made it possible. However when we read in the Bible this phrase, "*it is impossible*", we need to take it very seriously indeed, because it is God who is speaking and if God, the God of the impossible, says '*it's impossible*' you better believe it! This phrase is like a seal has determined something. It is worth noting if only for clarification there are a few ways that the dictionary renders the meaning of the word impossible, as follows:

- not able to occur, exist, or be done, not possible · beyond the bounds of possibility · out of the question · not worth considering · unfeasible · impracticable · non-viable · unworkable · beyond · unbearable · intolerable · unendurable · unsustainable

So when we see this phrase, *it is impossible*, it certainly engages the mind and calls for a close examination and inspection. What is stated as "impossible" is going to be under the scope this morning.

I must state first though, that these verses have caused many people a great deal of confusion because of their understanding of who this letter is actually addressed too. This group of confused people believe that this whole letter is for believers only, thereby, this leads them to conclude that the author is confirming the doctrine of "saved and lost". The confusion arises because the verses are taken out of context and if you do that, with this scripture or any other, you have what is called a pretext which means "a reason given in justification of a course of action that is not the real reason". Yet, as many of you who have been continuing on in this study of Hebrews, know that this letter or book, has been address to various group of people. Therefore, the words spoken here in this chapter, is to the people on the periphery of deciding for Christ and to those who don't know where to stand in the truth of the Gospel. This is a prime example of the need to read scripture in context.

So for those of you who are a little unconvinced of what I am saying, and it is good to question, there is a little but lovely clue in verse four that tells us to whom this warning is directed to, and it is the word, "those" rather than "us". Another reason we know Christians are not being addressed is because the believer need never fear they will lose their salvation. It's not possible as the Bible is absolutely clear about this fact. Jesus said,

*"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand"* (John 10:27-29).

Paul was equally clear in Romans 8 verses 35,38, 39

*"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*

*"He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus"*  
Philippians 1:6

We are *"to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, re- served in heaven,"* and we *"are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time"* 1 Peter 1:4-5

If the power of God cannot keep us, nothing is dependable or trustworthy or worth believing in. A Christian has no reason at any point in his life to believe that his salvation is or can be lost. If by Christ's death we can be saved, certainly by His life of power and intercession we can be kept saved as seen in Romans 5:10.

It is unbelievers who are in danger of losing the opportunity for salvation. The unbelieving Jews were in great danger, because of their spiritual immaturity and sluggishness, of turning back to Judaism and of never being able to repent and come to Christ. They would be lost forever, because they had rejected, at the most vital point in knowledge and conviction, the only gospel that could save them.

So we are going to put them into the right context. Remember last week we examined chapter 6 from verses 1 to 3? We looked at the "six foundational principles". These were the starting point, not the finishing line. We saw how the people were intrusted to progress and not regress. These verses this morning are just the continuation in which the writer of Hebrews discusses "Five Great Advantages" that the Hebrews had. It is the neglect of these five great advantages that leads to the impossible situation, spoken of at the start of verse 4, which is ultimately the loss of the ability to receive salvation and hence the dangers of languishing. The first Advantage they had – they were

## ONCE ENLIGHTENED

Once Enlightened does not make any reference to salvation, justification, sanctification, the new birth, or regeneration. Those who have once been enlightened are not spoken of as born again, made holy, or made righteous. None of the normal New Testament terminology for salvation is used. In fact, no term used here is ever used elsewhere in the New Testament for salvation, and none should be taken to refer to it.

The enlightenment spoken of here has to do with intellectual perception of spiritual, biblical truth. In the Septuagint, the Greek word (*photizo*) several times is translated "to give light by knowledge or teaching". It means to be mentally aware of something, to be instructed, or informed. It carries no connotation of response or of acceptance or rejection, belief or disbelief, it's just knowledge.

When Jesus first came to Galilee to minister, He declared that He had come to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2, which, in part, reads,

*"The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light"* Matthew 4:16.

All who encountered Jesus saw this "*great light*," but not all who saw and heard were saved. Seeing God's light and accepting it are two different things. Those people in Galilee, as all people who hear the gospel, were to some extent or otherwise enlightened, but, judging by the biblical accounts, few of them believed in Jesus. We see an example of this in John 6, verses 64 to 66 –

*But there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him. <sup>65</sup> And He said, "Therefore I have said to you that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father." <sup>66</sup> From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more.*

They had natural knowledge, factual information. They saw Christ, they heard His message from His own lips, they saw His miracles with their own eyes. They had first hand opportunity to see God's truth incarnate, an opportunity that only a few thousand people in all of history have had. The Light of the gospel had personally broken in on their darkness - John 12:35-36

*"Then Jesus said to them, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you; he who walks in darkness does not know*

*where he is going.<sup>36</sup> While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.” These things Jesus spoke, and departed, and was hidden from them”.*

The seriousness and weight of those words! Life for them could never be the same again. Their lives were permanently affected by the indelible impression Jesus must have made on them. Yet many, if not most, of them did not believe in Him. We read in John 12:37 to 40:

*“But although He had done so many signs before them, they did not believe in Him,<sup>38</sup> that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”<sup>39</sup> Therefore they could not believe, because Isaiah said again: <sup>40</sup> “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, Lest they should see with their eyes, Lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, So that I should heal them.” <sup>41</sup> These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him”.*

The same thing had happened to the Jews being addressed here in Hebrews 6:1-8. They were enlightened but not saved. Consequently, they were in danger of losing all opportunity of being saved, and of becoming apostate because they knew the truth yet rejected it. It is of such people that Peter speaks in his second letter in 2 Peter 2 verses 20 and 21 -

*“For if after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment delivered to them”*

Because of their unbelief, the light that was given to save them became a judgment against them. Just consider that for a moment, knowledge without acceptance of it becomes an instrument of judgement, consider also when “light becomes darkness”. How does that happen? Listen carefully, it’s when we fail *to do* the truth. Again, let me stress, that there is a world of a difference, in fact an eternal world of difference between knowing the truth and living it. Can you get to Heaven by simply knowing the Christmas story? Or knowing the account of Calvary? Or even about the resurrection? Knowing these things, is light, but what you do with them, is what really matters.

People may claim to know what the Bible says and claim to be a Christian, but living it out is literally the difference between light and darkness, being a professing Christian and a true

believer. The Spirit of God is saying here that we ought not to have any darkness, not even shadows when it comes to acting out personally the truth. Unfortunately, we have to keep repeating this because we can forget it so easily. We need more than enlightenment, we need reality.

Next advantage we come to is -

### **They Had TASTED OF THE HEAVENLY GIFT**

This group had not only seen the heavenly light, but they had tasted of the heavenly gift. The heavenly gift could be one of several things. The Holy Spirit is spoken of in Scripture as a heavenly gift, but, since He is mentioned in the next verse, I do not think that He is the gift meant here. The greatest heavenly gift, of course, is Christ Himself who is God's "indescribable gift," as termed in 2 Corinthians 9:15 and the salvation He brought, as spoke of in Ephesians 2:8.

This great gift, however, was not received. It was not feasted on, but only tasted, sampled. It was not accepted or lived, only examined. Before salvation, one of the Holy Spirit's ministries is to cause awareness of the need for salvation. In the Bible, there are many examples of when many people were set free, healed, feed, raise from the dead. They tasted many of the heavenly gifts, but never came to saving faith. We see this today around the world, many none believers experience this.

What contrast this is with Jesus' work on our behalf. Having tasted death for every man (Hebrews 2:9), He went on to drink it all. Jesus told the woman at Jacob's well,

*"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water"* John 4:10.

Jesus was speaking of the gift of salvation, the "*living water*" that leads to "*eternal life*" (v. 14). Those who drink it, not sip it or just taste it, but drink it, will be saved. A short time later in Galilee, Jesus told His hearers,

*"I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he shall live forever"* (John 6:51; cf. v. 35).

Eternal life comes from eating, not simply tasting God's gift of salvation in Christ. The Holy Spirit will give us a taste, but He will not make us eat. God placed the blessing of salvation to

the lips of these New Testament Jews, but they had not yet eaten. The tasting came from what they saw and heard, as many today have seen the transforming power of Christ and heard the Gospel, but never eat.

The majority of people who have had the privilege of hearing the Gospel, do not realise that they have tasted a heavenly gift. They don't realise the privilege it is to learn that Christ had offered the once and for all perfect sacrifice for sin and that He invites them to repent and receive Him into their lives to be Lord and Saviour. They, like the Jews, have tasted the good gift but rejected it on account of their own sinful pride. Time fly's away fast until you are standing before God, and what then? The accused will have no need of defence for it will all be made clear, the times when God sought to speak into their life, when opportunity was presented to them to turn toward God but they rejected it. Judgment will be passed, sentenced carried out. No right of appeal and no parole.

The Lord still strives with the Jew as well as the Gentile even today, warning us that the Spirit of God will not always strive with man. Remember what Genesis 6 verse 3 said just before the account on the Flood –

**And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.**

The next advantage that we read about in our text this morning is ;

### **They had PARTAKEN OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Partakers has to do with association, not possession. These Jews had never possessed the Holy Spirit, they simply were around when He was around. This word is used of fellow fishermen in Luke 5:7, and of Christ in relation to the angels in Hebrews 1:9. It has to do with sharing in common associations and events. In the context of Hebrews 6:4, it refers to anyone who has been where the Holy Spirit has been ministering. It is possible to have an association with the Holy Spirit, to share in what He does, and not be saved. By that I mean, you can be healed, you can feel great for being in the presence of God, even positivity empowered but this does not mean that you are saved. As we have seen in Hebrews chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 –

***how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, <sup>4</sup> God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?***

These Jews had heard the word, had seen and even participated in numerous signs, wonders, miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit. They were actually involved in some of His work, but never came through for the Gospel themselves. The Bible never speaks of Christians being associated with the Holy Spirit. It speaks of the Holy Spirit dwelling within them. Here, however, are people who are simply associated with the Holy Spirit. Perhaps, like most of the multitudes whom Jesus miraculously healed and fed. They partook of the Holy Spirit's power and blessings, but they did not have His indwelling. They did not possess the Holy Spirit, nor did the Holy Spirit possess them.

Every day, people, that is believers and non-believers are blessed of God. He makes the sun to shine down on them and the rain to fall on all. Every day we are blessed with life, health, and provision. We seem to forget to be thankful to God for all these blessings. We want more, we want what we want, and it doesn't matter where or whom it comes from. That is a spirit of indifference, of selfishness, and sinfulness. God blesses and we grumble.

The next advantage that we see is that

### **They Had TASTED THE GOOD WORD OF GOD**

Again, these readers are spoken of as having tasted something of God. This time His good word. The Greek term used here for word is *rhema*, which emphasizes the parts rather than the whole. This is not the usual one *logos* for God's Word, but it fits the meaning in this context. As with His heavenly gifts, they had heard God's utterances and sampled them, tasted them, without actually eating them. They had been taught about God, not just from the Apostles personal experiences with the Risen Saviour but the scriptures were unfolded to them. No doubt they regularly came to the assembly of the church. They may have listened cautiously and even thought carefully about what they heard. They took it all in, possibly with enthusiasm and appreciation. But they could not say with Jeremiah,

*"Thy words were found and I ate them and Thy words became for me a joy and the delight of my heart"* (Jeremiah 15:16).

They tasted but they did not eat, just like the nation to whom Jeremiah spoke.

Herod was like this. In spite of the prophet's hard message, including accusations directly against the king, Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist preach (Mark 6:20). He was perplexed but fascinated by this dynamic preacher. He liked to sample the message of God but when pressed into decision, he forsook God's man and God's message. He reluctantly,

but willingly, agreed to have John beheaded. His taste of God's Word only brought on him greater guilt.

As I said already, and will do again, tasting is the first step to eating. It is not wrong to taste God's Word. In fact, David encourages that very thing. "*O taste and see that the LORD is good*" (Psalm 34:8). To some degree, everyone must taste the gospel before he accepts it. The problem is if we stop with tasting. Like so many who hear the gospel for the first time, these Jews were attracted to its beauty and sweetness. It tasted very good to them, eternal life, peace with God, the love and grace of God, the good of God, relationship with God, His presence but they did not chew it or swallow it, much less digest it. They just kept tasting. Before long, its appealing taste left and they became indifferent to it. Their spiritual taste buds became insensitive and unresponsive. We are called here to receive the word of God, to receive Jesus into our Hearts and lives.

Now we come to the fifth advantage –

#### **They Had TASTED THE POWERS OF THE AGE TO COME**

The age to come is the future kingdom of God. The powers of the kingdom are miraculous powers. These Jews had seen the same kind of miracles that are going to come when Jesus brings in His earthly kingdom which we can read about in the Book of Revelation.

They tasted them. They saw the apostles do signs and wonders like those that will be reproduced in the millennial kingdom of Jesus Christ. They saw miracles upon miracles and the more they saw and tasted without receiving, the more their guilt increased. They may have even witnessed Jesus perform miracles for themselves, with their own eyes and ears. How hard it is to explain the hatred and unbelief of those who saw a resurrected Lazarus, who saw the blind given sight and the dumb given voices, and yet who rejected the One who did these marvellous things in front of their eyes. How guilty they will stand before God at the great white throne of judgment.

These Jews had been incredibly blessed by God's enlightenment, by association with His Holy Spirit, by tasting of His heavenly gifts, His good Word, and His power. Yet, they still did not believe.

So when we go back to the start of verse 4, we see that in light of these 5 advantages, it is impossible for these people as verse 6 points –

*"if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame."*

To renew means to restore, to bring back to an original condition. The original condition of these Jews was that of excitement about the gospel when they first heard it. It was beautiful. They had moved from Judaism right up to the edge of Christianity, evidently even to repentance. They had tried to turn from their sin. There was nothing else God could say or do. If they fell away, they did so with an evil heart of unbelief and they did it against full revelation. They had the advantage of having been raised under the Old Covenant and they had heard and seen all the beauty and perfection of the New covenant. Given their position and their decision of refusing to come across the threshold, their unwillingness to trust God and His Messiah, would seal their eternal destiny.

Verse 6 explains very clearly, that they could not return because it's as if they had crucified the Son of God themselves, and put Him to open shame. The word "themselves", simply means that, as far as they were concerned, the Son of God deserved to be crucified. Regardless of what they had been, or ever were professing openly and publicly, they now took their stand with the crucifiers. In their hearts they said, *"That's the same verdict we would give."* They had made trial of Jesus Christ and, with all the evidence possible, they decided He was not the true Messiah. They had turned around and gone back to Judaism. To them Jesus was an impostor, a deceiver, and He got exactly what was coming to Him. They agreed with those who killed Jesus, and they put Him to an open shame again. Shame here connotes guilt. They declared openly that Jesus was guilty as charged.

Very serious stuff indeed and you know, when anyone has heard the gospel and then turns away, they do exactly what these Jews did. Though they would never take up a hammer and spikes to physically nail Jesus to a cross, they nevertheless agree to Jesus' crucifixion. They take their place with the crucifiers. If this happens with full light, such a person has become an apostate, and for him salvation is forever out of reach for they have rejected Jesus Christ against the full light and power of the gospel. They are incurably anti-God, and for them is reserved the hottest hell. They take their place with Judas, who walked, talked, ate and fellowshiped with God incarnate, yet finally rejected Him which we will see when we get to Hebrews chapter 10.

It is dangerously and even self-deception for a person to think that by staying on the sidelines, by holding off deciding, by thinking themselves tolerant of the gospel simply because they do not outwardly oppose it, that they are safe. The longer one stays on the edge the more they lean towards the old life. Staying there too long inevitably results in falling away from the gospel forever. It may not be, and often is not, a conscious decision against Christ, but it is a decision and it is against Christ nonetheless. When you go away from Christ in full light, you place Him on the cross again, in your own heart, and put yourself forever out of the Lord's reach. How terribly serious it is to reject Jesus Christ as Messiah and Saviour. This bring us to verses 7 and 8,

*"For ground that drinks the rain which often falls upon it and brings forth vegetation useful to those for whose sake it is also tilled, receives a blessing from God; but if it yields thorns and thistles, it is worthless and close to being cursed, and it ends up being burned."*

Do you see the meaning of this illustration given in these verses? It's pretty self-explanatory. It is basically saying - All those who hear the gospel are like the earth. The rain. Which is the Word of God, falls, truth is heard. The gospel seed is planted and there is nourishment and growth. Some of the growth is beautiful, good and productive. It is that which is planted, rooted, and nourished in God. But some of the growth is false, spurious, and unproductive. It has come from the same seed and has been nourished by the same ground and the same water, but has become thorny, destructive, and worthless. It has rejected the life offered to it and become good only for burning. This is very similar to the parables that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 13. In verse 51 Jesus asked a very pointed question –

*Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord."*

If Jesus asked us this question about these verses, what would our answer be? Let us spare a thought for those who refer to themselves as 'Christians' but are not true believers. They don't even have a clue of Christ's teachings nor do they have the heart for them. We can only pray for these people, and even plead with them, but ultimately it is their decision. We are so blessed to be saved and in right standing before God. God in His mercy has been extremely gracious to us. We have been miraculously delivered and when we read verses like these, we can't help but praise God. **Amen.**